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SUBJECT: PAN ELECTS NEW PRESIDENT IN WAKE OF PARTY DIVISION

Classified By: Confidential by Political Minister Counselor Charles Bar
clay.

Reason: 1.4 (b),(d).

¶1. Summary: On August 8, the National Action Party's (PAN's) Central Committee (CEN) elected Cesar Nava as its new party president. Nava, President Calderon's hand-picked candidate, replaces German Martinez who resigned in the aftermath of the PAN's stinging defeat in the July mid-term elections. PAN leaders have squabbled openly in recent weeks and have criticized Calderon's micromanagement of the electoral campaign. Despite bad blood among factions, most experts do not expect party tensions to assume the debilitating character of those that have wracked PAN's leftist rival, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD). PAN malcontents have little room to maneuver and will not want to undermine the party's viability in the run up to the 2012 elections. Their contentiousness, however, could undermine the party's image in coming months. End Summary.

Criticism of Calderon on the Rise

¶2. (C) Following PAN's midterm electoral defeat, several prominent PANistas openly criticized Calderon and former PAN President German Martinez hijacking the party's historically open candidate selection process. They voiced their long-standing frustration that Calderon and Martinez favored a select few and not particularly qualified party leaders to develop and implement the party's electoral strategy. (Critics have singled out Secretary of the Economy, Gerardo Ruiz Mateos, as an inept presidential confidant.) Following Martinez's resignation, party critics complained that Calderon was forcing his replacement on a reluctant party rank and file. Public complaints reached such proportions, said a staffer for influential PAN Senator and Calderon critic Adriana Gonzalez, that Calderon met privately with his critics in late July in an unsuccessful attempt to build support for Nava. In the final days before the internal election, however, the detractors only became more vocal.

¶3. (C) PAN insider Federico Ling told Poloff that Calderon's problems within his party are largely due to his long-standing efforts to marginalize its right flank, particularly the religious-conservative, "El Yunque" faction. Cornered members of this group, headed by former party president Manuel Espino, have sought to build alliances with other disgruntled PAN party leaders and legislators such as Santiago Creel, Javier Corral, and Gerardo Priego. The group was emboldened by the progressive weakening of Martinez (who had deposed Espino in late 2007 with Calderon's support) over the weeks leading up to the July 5 elections.

14. (C) Nava's August 8 election by PAN's Central Committee to complete Martinez's term will probably not end the dispute. Calderon's former private secretary and close confidant, Nava was the only candidate to stand for election. While he easily secured the support of the two-thirds of the Central Committee required to confirm his election, his opponents insist that Calderon had strong-armed the Committee to prevent the emergence of a viable alternative. Espino and Creel boycotted the election and called on their supporters to follow suit.

15. Comment: The bickering is not likely to take on the fratricidal proportions of intra-party conflict within the PRD. Nava has expressed his commitment to reuniting the party and promoting structural reforms. For his part, Calderon has taken a low-key approach to his critics and refuses to be drawn into public debate. The party remains united by a strong center-right political agenda and is uniformly aware that its strategy and tactics in the July mid-terms were flawed and must be reconsidered. Nevertheless, several PAN insiders confided that they envision no quick resolution to the internal tension. Ultimately, Calderon will not change his governing style, and his antagonists are not likely to alter their tactics. PAN faces a potentially bruising candidate selection process for ten gubernatorial races in 2010, which could further aggravate tension and project the image of disunity during a critical period. End Comment.

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